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ECO-FRIENDLY DEVELOPMENT

## Will eco-friendly development without sprawl be Orlando area's destiny?

Mark Pino

Picturing a city of a quarter-million people doesn't conjure images of green and blue.

But renderings of Destiny -- planned for more than 41,300 acres of the southeast corner of Osceola County -- show a city center with a floating market, biking and hiking paths and hundreds of miles of navigable waterways.

Under the concept to be unveiled today, water would be used for transportation as well as a way to contain sprawl.

Touted as the country's first "eco-sustainable" city, Destiny is being planned near Yeehaw Junction at [Florida's Turnpike](#) and State Road 60.

Construction probably won't start until 2011, says Chief Operating Officer [Randy Johnson](#). But in 50 years, as many as 250,000 residents could call the community home.

Right now, the area is mainly sod farms and cow pastures.

"The first thing that makes a sustainable city possible is that we have a clean slate," Johnson said. "All the things that make a community work, we're going to have to build from scratch."

Making sure the environment is protected will be vital, said [Charles Lee](#), advocacy director for Audubon of Florida.

"We view the Destiny proposal as one of both tremendous opportunity and tremendous risk at the same time," Lee said. "To me the key is that conservation promises have to be made upfront. That will be the hallmark of success or failure of the project. "

Lee said much of the property's natural habitat is worth saving and that if the owners pledge to preserve it, the idea of a denser city makes sense as a way to diminish sprawl.

Osceola County is working to amend its comprehensive plan with rules that would allow for the development of rural land. If Destiny meets the conditions, it could build its city, said Jeff Jones, the county's smart-growth director. He said the county is looking at Destiny as an

economic-development tool.

"The county has a desire to diversify and transform the economy. A new city would have the ability to attract new development and new industries into the county," he said.

Destiny will have to show that it can attract the types of jobs the county wants and that there is a realistic plan to succeed before it receives development rights.

Most officials want to make sure that Destiny is not a drag on the rest of the county, requiring services such as fire, police, roads and schools, for which it cannot pay. County Property Appraiser Atlee Mercer said Destiny could be a way to slow sprawl.

"We're going to have another quarter-million people here in the next 20 years. We can just spread them out as we've been doing. Or do we say, 'We've got another idea. Let's infill what we've got [existing cities] and then build another city.' "

*Mark Pino can be reached at 407-931-5935 or [mpino@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:mpino@orlandosentinel.com).*